Difficulties of the Bible

Rev. Dr. H. C. Cameron
with kindest regards
of Mrs Cutter

Washington D. C.
May 3. 1889

THE LOST FAITH,

AND

DIFFICULTIES OF THE BIBLE AS TESTED BY THE LAWS OF EVIDENCE.

BY

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SOME of the most pathetic cases of the spiritual unrest and skepticism of the day are found among the children of Christian parents. They have been brought up to believe the Bible, but under the influences that have met them as they have gone out from the old home into the world their early faith has been shaken, and not unfrequently destroyed. To such as these, and, beyond these, to all who have come to believe that our age has passed beyond the Bible, it is hoped that the incidents and arguments of this little book may be of service.

WASHINGTON, D. C., June, 1888.

THE LOST FAITH.

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LETTER I.

My Dear C——: It is useless for you to write to me on the subject of your last letter. I appreciate your motives, but with me the question is settled. I have given up the beliefs of my childhood; they had long been a burden to me, and the writings and lectures of Mr. —— did the rest. Have you heard him? Can he be fairly answered? I am not, indeed, as confident as he is that there is no personal God, though I do not believe it can be *proved*, and I entirely agree with him in abhorring and rejecting the doctrine of future suffering. This was the horrible nightmare of my childhood, and you cannot conceive the relief that the rejec-

tion of the doctrine has given me. I am frank to say, from my own experience and that of others, that this is the point that gives Mr. —— his hold on so many. The doctrine of endless suffering for the sins of this life is abhorrent to them, and they welcome his views almost as a first truth of reason. This, at least, is my position. The existence of God cannot be proved, nor can any immortality for man except in the influence he may leave behind him. But a truce to this. Come to me soon if you are not afraid of my "infidelity," and let us live over the days of our boyhood. Most of the dear old friends are gone; we are nearly alone, and I am not inclined to drop the last links of brighter, and perhaps better, days than these now upon us. Yours, truly, A——.

My Dear A——: Your letter has moved me deeply. Yes, we are almost alone. Of all the dear group that used to gather in the old school-

house, and play upon the common, and stroll along the river-banks in summer and skate upon its solid surface in winter, you and I are nearly all that remain. The Southern sea has poor H——; W——, the leader of our sports, fell (under another name, I think) with Custer's band in the wild tragedy of Montana; B—— and S—— won their honors, and were buried with them, on the battlefield; K—— lives a wreck in mind and body. The rest are scattered. The old homes are all changed; the inmates are gone from them for ever.

And you are changed. No recollections of the past that your letter has called up have impressed me more sadly than the change you speak of in yourself. You have lost the faith of your childhood. It is true you do not speak of it as a loss: you think you have gained by it. Your early beliefs oppressed you, and you have escaped the burden by rejecting belief in God and in a future life.

Let me claim the liberty of an old friend—it

may be for the last time, for we shall soon both be away—and ask if you are *sure* of your ground. The questions are too momentous, the interests involved are too great and too lasting, to be risked on an uncertainty. You are not, indeed, sure that there is no God, but you are sure that no man can prove that there is; and you are equally certain that there can be no future state of suffering for any. Your final conclusions you have reached through the influence of Mr. ——, and you admit that his hold on you and on others has come largely through his passionate denials of the doctrine of future retribution. I have no doubt this is so. But, after all, is this decisive? Are Mr. ——'s doubts and denials more to be relied on than the positive beliefs of as intelligent and good men as the world has ever seen? I do not press this as proof one way or the other, but it is something worth thinking of before you give up for ever your respect for Christianity and the Bible.

Your letter has called up memories that will not down at the bidding. You remember your mother; you remember her life; you remember her death. The day after her burial we were sitting, you and I, under the old willow on the bank of the river—it is all before me now—and you told me how she died with her hand on your head, and how before she died you promised to meet her again. Was it all a delusion? Did she go out in final darkness? And was your promise the folly of childhood?

Will you bear with me if I recall another and a later scene? The days of childhood were behind us. We had drifted apart. You remained among the old home-scenes; I was making my way among strangers. Then one went from you who had become dearer to you than a mother. I have before me a letter that came to me out of the shadows of that bitter trial; I know you will not misjudge me if I quote its words now. Thus you wrote: "I am sure such a life cannot have ended; the possi-

bilities of it cannot yet be finished. That soul, with all its sweetness and beauty and brightness, cannot have been quenched like a spark on the ocean. . . . Her last words were, 'I go with Him who has brought life and immortality to light, and who has opened the kingdom of heaven to all believers.'" I would not recall these early views and faiths unkindly. If they were wrong, of course you are right in parting with them; but is it certain they were wrong? And in giving them up have you found something better and more sure to take their place?

One important point I presume you have not overlooked: whatever doubts there may be as to the existence of God, *atheism can never be proved.* No man can ever be sure that there is *not* a God; he may deny that the proof of divine existence satisfies *him*, but that is all he can do. Somewhere in the universe, after all, God may be. No man has explored all its recesses; none has pierced its limitless heights; none has threaded all its dark

abysses and found that in it all there is no God. A man must himself have the attributes of God to know that there is no God. And suppose I cannot prove that there is a God? If I live as if there were one and it should happen that there is not, I am safe; I lose nothing. But if I live as if there were no God and it should come to pass at last that there is, where am I? Of two untraveled paths, it is wisest to take that which is *known* to be safe.

But suppose it to be a question of probabilities. Suppose you have to choose between an endless succession of finite causes, as a man, an oak, a flower, a dewdrop—not one of which is adequate to its own existence—and one infinite, eternal self-existent, almighty and allwise Cause of all things (and some such choice sooner or later you must make), which is the better? Which is the more reasonable? If you think through these questions at all, either you must at last admit a God or you must make something for yourself that will do the

work of God; and the God you make *must do what actually is done now;* what he will do hereafter, who can say? Your friend, Mr. ——, tells you that "all there is is all the God there is"—that "the universe is all there is or was or will be." This is pantheistic atheism; it is a mere assertion without a particle of proof; and if true, it can give us no relief for the future, as I hope to satisfy you.

By the side of this utterance of Mr. —— let me put the words of that king in the realm of science, Professor Joseph Henry. They are found in the last letter that he ever wrote, and may be taken as the final summing up of all those vast researches that have made his name the heritage of the world. They are entitled to some weight as against the statements of men who, if they can follow in his footsteps at all, must follow afar off. These are his words: "After all our speculations and an attempt to grapple with the problem of the universe, the simplest conception which explains and connects

the phenomena is that of the existence of one spiritual Being infinite in wisdom, in power and all divine perfections." That is, the simplest and the best explanation of the facts of the universe is found in the existence of God. This is testimony accepted by the highest scientific authority both in this country and in Europe. I do not say that it proves there is a God, but it does prove that belief in God is consistent with the highest intellectual power. To disbelieve is no proof of a great mind.

Mr. —— eulogizes Thomas Paine as one of the greatest and best men of his age—a man "whose writings carry conviction to the dullest." Now, Paine, though a bitter enough infidel, as we all know, never so parted from his reason or his reverence as to deny the existence of God. He says with a force that, according to Mr. ——, must "carry conviction to the dullest:" "I know I did not make myself, and yet I have existence; and by searching into the nature of other things I find no other thing could make itself, and yet millions of

other things exist; therefore it is that I know by positive conclusions resulting from this search that there is a power superior to all these things, and that power is God." Paine believed in God; he believed in a future life; he believed in the person of Christ, of whom Mr. —— so far takes leave of all historic judgment, and even of all respectable infidel judgments, as to say we do not know that he ever existed!

This suggests a word in regard to your questions whether I have heard Mr. —— and whether he can be fairly answered. I have never heard him on the subjects of which you speak, but I have read enough, I think, to judge him fairly. I recognize his brilliant gifts, his wit, his rhetorical power, but I am surprised that one of your natural clearness of mind should not see that he deals most unfairly with the questions of religion. His representation of Christianity is a caricature, and it takes great charity not to believe it is an *intentional* caricature. His treatment of the Script-

ures is inexcusably unfair. If a Christian were to deal with an infidel book as Mr. —— deals with the Bible, there would be no bound to the charges of outrageous misrepresentation and perversion. His abuse of Christians and Christianity is often more like the raving of a madman than like the calm judgment of a fair-minded reasoner. What are we to think of a man who can sit down and deliberately write and send out to the world such words as these?—"Hundreds, and thousands, and millions, have lost their reason in contemplating the monstrous falsehoods of Christianity;" "Nine-tenths of the people in the penitentiaries are believers;" "The orthodox Christian says that if he can only save his little soul, if he can barely squeeze into heaven, . . . it matters not to him what becomes of brother or sister, father or mother, wife or child. He is willing that they should burn if he can sing." This is enough. But what shall be said of such ravings? Suppose Mr. —— finds imperfections in the Church; suppose he finds a

multitude of professed Christians that are not what they should be, just as Christ has given us reason to expect,—does that settle the real nature of Christianity? Suppose "nine-tenths of the people in the penitentiaries" were American citizens,—does that prove that American citizenship is a bad thing or make it worth while for a man to spend his life in denouncing our Constitution? Mr. —— knows there is a very different kind of citizen, and he knows that these men are in the penitentiary, not because they have kept the laws of their country, but because they have broken them. So, even if the monstrous assertion were true that nine-tenths of the occupants of the penitentiaries are Christian professors, they are there, not on account of Christianity, but in spite of it. True Christianity never sent them there, and every honest man knows that. Christianity is founded on Christ, and the required fruit of it is holiness, rectitude with man and purity before God. This is a fact that any man who *wants* to know the truth can understand

by an hour's study of the teachings of Christ and his apostles.

To your question whether Mr. —— can be answered, I say deliberately he has been answered a hundred times. I do not think that in all his assaults on the Bible he has advanced a respectable argument or objection that has not been urged and answered again and again long before he was born. The Christian Church has not the least fear for herself from his attacks; indeed, she understands them so well, and has repelled them so often, that she is perhaps too indifferent to anything he may say. The danger is not to the Church, but to those *who want to be convinced that the Bible is not true, and who want to be assured that, however they may live in this life, they have nothing to fear in a life to come.*

Indulge me in another letter, and believe me

Yours, truly,

C——.

LETTER II.

My Dear A——: The two questions that press upon every mind, and that Mr. —— has shown again and again, with wonderful pathos, by dying beds and at open graves, are pressing upon his, are these: Is there a God? Is there a future state of existence? To these questions the best answer Mr. —— has to give is, "We do not know." He seems confident that there is no personal God, and "we cannot say whether death is a wall or a door, the beginning or the end of a day, the spreading of pinions to soar or the folding for ever of wings, the rise or the set of a sun." With all this uncertainty, he is absolutely sure that there is no future state of suffering for evil-doers. He does not know whether there is any future at all, but he does know that there is no future of sorrow. He is profoundly

ignorant as to the *fact* of a future, but has decisive knowledge as to the *nature* of the future, if there is one. "Rather than that this doctrine of endless punishment should be true," he says, "I would gladly see the fabric of our civilization, crumbling, fall to unmeaning chaos and to formless dust, where oblivion broods and even memory forgets."

Now, it may be quite true that Mr. —— has this preference, yet this does not settle the case. We can fully understand how any man should shrink from the terrible possibility of future suffering. Orthodoxy has no more delight in it than has infidelity. But it is not a question of preference: it is a question of fact; and the point I submit for your reflection is this—whether Mr. ——, on his own ground, is authorized to affirm that there is no future state of suffering for any. He says we do not know whether there *is* any future state. Very well. Then, certainly, we do not know what *kind* of a future state there may be, if there is one. If Mr. —— is not able to assure us that there is no

future for us at all, he surely has not the ground to assure us of any kind of a future, good or bad. There may be a future of joy, there may be a future of suffering; there may be both. Mr. —— is too good a lawyer to undertake to prove anything by mere negative evidence. He "leaves the dead with Nature, the mother of all," and "Nature," as to any sure utterance upon the future, is as silent as are the lips of the dead themselves.

Mr. —— does not believe in a personal God. *You* are not sure whether there is one or not. There may be; there may be none. If there is, we cannot know it. Let us see what we gain on either supposition.

Suppose there is a God, though I cannot know it or I cannot know him. Then, clearly, I cannot know what he is; I cannot know what he may do. It is quite possible that this unknown God may be a God who hates what we call sin, and who will punish it, and who will punish it just as long as it stands an offence in the moral universe, whether it

be in this world or in the world to come. No agnosticism can deny this conclusion. The darkest as well as the most radiant scenes that Christian faith brings within our view *may* be eternally true. I may be immortal, and it may be an immortality of joy or of sighing for me as I use this life and the truth that God has made known to me in this life.

Let us take the other hypothesis. Suppose there is no God; suppose Mr. —— has satisfied me that there is no supernatural revelation, and no personal God to make one. Has he made it well for me hereafter? Has he delivered me from all fear for the future? Has he saved me beyond question from "the serpent of eternal pain"? If there is no God, does that make it certain that there will be no future suffering for any man? Let us see. We are here in a world of suffering. How came we here? and how did suffering come here? If we came without a God, who will prove that without a God we may not go elsewhere, and that

suffering may not go with us? Here we are—by natural law, by evolution, by chance—as part and particle of the one eternal unity; however it may be, we are here, and we suffer. We know what pain of body and pain of mind are. We have felt the sting of death, and no law of nature, no power of evolution, has ever lighted up for us the darkness of the grave. Now, the question we want answered is this: If "Nature" has brought us into this state where there is so much of what we call sin, and so much bound with it that we call suffering, how do we know that the same "Nature" may not continue the same facts hereafter? Nay, what assurance can Mr. —— give us that "Nature" is not a power that may in some future frenzy cast us into a state *far worse* than the present? Is he so far possessed of all the secrets of "Nature" that he *knows* the time will never come when she may strike us with a force more terrible than any retributive judgment of God? If "Nature" works now in storm and fire, in earthquake and pestilence,

in disease and torture and death, in the sorrows of memory, the horrors of remorse and dread forebodings of coming woe, *how do you know that she may not manifest herself thus hereafter and through the ages to come?*

If Nature is, as Mr. —— says, the mother of us all, there are times when she manifests her motherhood appallingly. And when are these manifestations to end and how are they to end? If under her regal sway we find that, as a fact, sin and suffering are connected here, can any man prove that it may not be a law of "Nature" herself that sin and suffering shall be connected eternally? If in the imperial reign of "the mother of us all" there are chains and scourges, prisons and scaffolds, thunderbolts and flames, cyclones and famines and ocean-graves, will any man prove that somewhere in the darkness and mystery of the future there may not be, in the long outworking of this reign, something worse than a hell, worse than an undying worm, worse than a quenchless fire?

It is, I admit, a fearful thing to fall unprepared into the hands of the living God; but if I must choose, give me that, a thousand times, rather than the terrific possibilities that overhang us all if we are to be eternally at the disposal of a blind, inexorable, soulless, merciless "Nature." The Judge of all the earth will do right; at the worst we shall receive no more at his hands than we deserve; but no created being can tell us what we shall receive at the hands of an irresponsible, pitiless "Nature" though she be "the mother of us all." There is nothing so dark and terrible in all the woes of the Bible as the possibilities that Mr. —— offers us in his gospel; and there is this difference: the Bible opens wide a door of hope for all who care to enter it; Mr. —— leads us out into the outer darkness and leaves us there. Is it worth while for any man to spend his life in persuading us to make this exchange of despair? And is it worth our while —yours or mine—to make it? Truly yours,

C——.

LETTER III.

My Dear A——: In the note in which you kindly acknowledge my former communications you say that, whatever Christianity may be to me, you cannot see it as I do; its excellences, as they appear to my mind, do not impress you at all, and as long as they do not you cannot be expected to accept it. I admit the conclusion: you cannot receive as good and true what does not seem to be so. But does it follow that a thing is not good and true because you do not see it? The question still comes, Is the cause in the thing or in you?

You remember the Beethoven concert we once attended together in B——? To you it was an occasion of exquisite enjoyment; to me it was nothing. The difference was not in the music: it was in us. You have a musical taste; I have not.

I tried—not very sincerely, perhaps—to persuade you that there was nothing beautiful in it; you smiled, but attempted no argument. You were wise. You knew the music was beautiful, for you had experienced it; you had felt its power. If I chose to deny it because I had not felt it, so it must be; you could only pity me.

Now, is it not possible that there may be something like this in religion? May it not be a reality —a supreme reality—though you do not see it or feel it? May I not know it to be real because I have felt its power? And if there are thousands and tens of thousands as intelligent men and women as the world has ever seen who are as ready to testify that they have felt the power and experienced the reality of the Christian religion as you are to testify that you have felt the power and know the sweetness of music, are you wise to dismiss its claims because *you* have not felt the force of them? You must see this. I leave it to your candor. Christianity may be true though you have not felt

its truth. A cloud of witnesses stand ready to testify to you its truth from personal experience. They may not argue with you: multitudes of them could not argue with you; but, after all, they have a proof of the reality of their religion, of the power of Christ to satisfy and bless men, which no arguments in the world can shake. If all this were a new thing, or if the witnesses were only ignorant and superstitious men, you might well enough hesitate to receive the testimony; but when you reflect that it is the accumulated testimony of nearly nineteen centuries, that it comes from all countries and all classes, from the prince on the throne and the beggar at his gate, from the philosopher in his study and the sailor in the forecastle, from the statesman in the cabinet and the ploughman in the furrow, I submit it cannot with wisdom or reason be set aside. It is no answer to say that many great men and learned men and ploughmen can be brought who have had no such experience and give no such testimony. This is true, but it is

one of the first laws of evidence that no amount of merely negative testimony can overthrow the explicit evidence of honest, intelligent, trustworthy witnesses. Fifty men who did not see a murder could not set aside the clear testimony of two who did see it. Few of the race have ever seen the moons of Mars, or even of Jupiter; this does not disturb the witness of the few who have: the satellites are there.

I have just been reading—not for the first time—Peter Harvey's account of his visit, with Daniel Webster, to John Colby. You will find it in Harvey's *Reminiscences of Webster;* and if you have not read it, it is worth your reading. Colby had married Webster's oldest sister when Webster was a mere boy. It was in some respects a strange marriage. She was a godly, Christian woman, while Colby was a wild, reckless, ungodly man—"the wickedest man in the neighborhood," Webster believed, "as far as swearing and impiety went." He seems to have been the terror of Web-

ster's boyhood. Singularly enough for New England, though a man of strong natural powers, he never learned to read till he was over eighty years of age. His wife died early, and the families drifted apart. Webster had not seen Colby for over forty years, but he heard that a great change had taken place with him, and he visited him to judge for himself. I should mar the story of the interview if I undertook to condense it. Let me give the essential parts of it in Mr. Harvey's own words. Long as it is, I think you would be sorry to have it shorter.

Webster and Harvey had driven to Andover, and were directed to Mr. Colby's house. "The door was open. . . . Sitting in the middle of the room was a striking figure who proved to be John Colby. He sat facing the door, in a very comfortably furnished farmhouse room, with a little table—or what perhaps would be called a light-stand—before him. Upon it was a large, old-fashioned Scott's Family Bible in very large print, and, of course, a

heavy volume. It lay open, and he had evidently been reading it attentively. As we entered he took off his spectacles and laid them upon the page of the book, and looked up at us as we approached, Mr. Webster in front. He was a man, I should think, over six feet in height, and he retained in a wonderful degree his erect and manly form, although he was eighty-five or six years old. His frame was that of a once powerful, athletic man. His head was covered with very heavy, thick, bushy hair, and it was as white as wool, which added very much to the picturesqueness of his appearance. As I looked in at the door I thought I never saw a more striking figure. He straightened himself up, but said nothing till just as we appeared at the door, when he greeted us with—

"'Walk in, gentlemen.'

"Mr. Webster's first salutation was—

"'This is Mr. Colby—Mr. John Colby—is it not?'

"'That is my name, sir,' was the reply.

"'I suppose you don't know me?' said Mr. Webster.

"'No, sir, I don't know you; and I should like to know how you know me.'

"'I have seen you before, Mr. Colby,' replied Mr. Webster.

"'Seen me before!' said he; 'pray, when and where?'

"'Have you no recollection of me?' asked Mr. Webster.

"'No, sir, not the slightest;' and he looked by Mr. Webster toward me, as if trying to remember if he had seen me.

"Mr. Webster remarked,

"'I think you never saw this gentleman before, but you have seen me.'

"Colby put the question again,

"'When and where?'

"'You married my oldest sister,' replied Mr. Webster, calling her by name.

"'I married your oldest sister!' exclaimed Colby. 'Who are you?'

"'I am "little Dan,"' was the reply.

"It certainly would be impossible to describe the expression of wonder, astonishment and half incredulity that came over Colby's face.

"'*You* Daniel Webster!' said he; and he started to rise from his chair. As he did so he stammered out some words of surprise. 'Is it possible that this is the little black lad that used to ride the horse to water? Well, I cannot realize it!'

"Mr. Webster approached him. They embraced each other, and both wept.

"'Is it possible,' said Mr. Colby, when the embarrassment of the first shock of recognition was past, 'that you have come up here to see me? Is this Daniel? Why! why!' said he, 'I cannot believe my senses. Now, sit down. I am glad—oh, I am so glad to see you, Daniel. I never expected to see you again. I don't know what to say. I am so glad that my life has been spared that I might see you.

Why, Daniel, I read about you and hear about you in all ways. Sometimes some members of the family come and tell us about you, and the newspapers tell us a great deal about you, too. Your name seems to be constantly in the newspapers. They say that you are a great man—that you are a famous man—and you can't tell how delighted I am when I hear such things. But, Daniel, the time is short; you will not stay here long: I want to ask you one important question. You may be a *great* man: are you a *good* man? Are you a Christian man? Do you love the Lord Jesus Christ? That is the only question that is worth asking or answering? Are you a Christian? You know, Daniel, what I have been: I have been one of the wickedest of men. Your poor sister, who is now in heaven, knows that. But the Spirit of Christ and of almighty God has come down and plucked me as a brand from the everlasting burning. I am here now, a monument to his grace. Oh, Daniel, I would not give what is contained within the covers

of this book for all the honors that have been conferred upon men from the creation of the world until now. For what good would it do? It is all nothing, and less than nothing, if you are not a Christian, if you are not repentant. If you do not love the Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity and truth, all your worldly honors will sink to utter nothingness. Are you a Christian? Do you love Christ? You have not answered me.'

"All this was said in the most earnest and even vehement manner.

"'John Colby,' replied Mr. Webster, 'you have asked me a very important question, and one which should not be answered lightly. I intend to give you an answer, and one that is truthful, or I will not give you any. I hope that I am a Christian. I profess to be a Christian. But, while I say that, I wish to add—and I say it with shame and confusion of face—that I am not such a Christian as I wish I were. I have lived in the world, surrounded by its honors and its temptations, and I

am afraid, John Colby, that I am not so good a Christian as I ought to be. I am afraid I have not your faith and your hopes; but still I hope and trust that I am a Christian, and that the same grace which has converted you and made you an heir of salvation will do the same for me. I trust it, and I also trust, John Colby—and it will not be long before our summons will come—that we shall meet in a better world, and meet those who have gone before us whom we knew, and who trusted in that same divine free grace. It will not be long. You cannot tell, John Colby, how much delight it gave me to hear of your conversion. The hearing of that is what has led me here to-day. I came here to see with my own eyes and hear with my own ears the story from a man that I know and remember so well. What a wicked man you used to be!'

"'Oh, Daniel,' exclaimed John Colby, 'you don't remember how wicked I was, how ungrateful I was, how unthankful I was. I never thought of

God; I never cared for God; I was worse than a heathen. Living in a Christian land with the light shining all around me and the blessings of Sabbath teachings everywhere about me, I was worse than a heathen until I was arrested by the grace of Christ and made to see my sinfulness and to hear the voice of my Saviour. Now I am only waiting to go home to him, and to meet your sainted sister, my poor wife. And I wish, Daniel, that you might be a prayerful Christian; and I trust you are. Daniel,' he added, with deep earnestness of voice, 'Will you pray with me?'

"We knelt down, and Mr. Webster offered a most touching prayer. As soon as he had pronounced the 'Amen,' Mr. Colby followed in a most pathetic, stirring appeal to God. He prayed for the family, for me and for everybody. Then we rose, and he seemed to feel a serene happiness in having thus joined his spirit with that of Mr. Webster in prayer. . . .

"The brothers-in-law took an affectionate leave

of each other, and we left. Mr. Webster could hardly restrain his tears. When we got into the wagon, he began to moralize:

"'I should like,' said he, 'to know what the enemies of religion would say to John Colby's conversion. There was a man as unlikely, humanly speaking, to become a Christian as any man I ever saw. He was reckless, heedless, impious—never attended church, never experienced the good influence of associating with religious people—and here he has been living on in that reckless way until he has got to be an old man, until a period of life when you naturally would not expect his habits to change, and yet he has been brought into the condition in which we have seen him to-day, a penitent, trusting, humble believer. Whatever people may say,' added Mr. Webster, 'nothing can convince me that anything short of the grace of almighty God could make such a change as I with my own eyes have witnessed in the life of John Colby.'"

Mr. Colby was eighty-four years old at the time of his conversion. At that age he learned to read for the single purpose of reading the Bible, and it was the only book he ever did read. He lived for three years after this, and to the end gave the clearest evidences of a change that to Mr. Webster's judicial mind could be explained only by the supposition of a divine interposition; it was a divine reality. The last intelligible words of the once terrible blasphemer were, "Jesus! glory!"

Changing the details, the experience of John Colby has been the experience of thousands upon thousands. And—I put it to you in all candor—is it all a lie? Was Webster—one of the grandest intellects of this or of any age—was he a fanatic or a fool to believe in the reality of the religion that John Colby had experienced? Was he a weakling to put his faith where John Colby had put his, and to trust that when the summons of both should come—as it soon did come—they might meet each other and those who had gone

before them trusting in the same divine, free grace?

You may criticise the Bible, you may criticise Christians, but, after all, there is something in Christianity that cannot be explained away as a superstition or a delusion; there is something that cannot be dismissed by a scoff or with indifference. Somewhere and at some time it will have the final word, and it will be heard. I commend it to your honest and earnest judgment now. Try it; I ask no more. Settle the great questions that press on every heart as the Bible opens the way of settlement to you, and wait the issue. You can lose nothing; you may gain everything. The fact is as remarkable as it is familiar that no man in the last hour here—the hour, often, of supernal light—ever wanted to take back or to change his faith in the Man of Nazareth as the Son of God and the Saviour of men. When the shadows are melting in the great realities, and the mysteries of life are about to be finished and the verities of the future

are to be proved, no man has yet been found to mourn that in the face of all difficulty and doubt and denial here he was a Christian. Can that, or anything approaching it, be said of any form of atheism or infidelity or unbelief?

As ever, yours,

C——.

LETTER IV.

My Dear A——: I had supposed my last letter would end our correspondence. Your kind reply has gratified me more than I can express. Without further words, let me take up at once the question that you put, I am sure, sincerely. You ask, "What *is* 'the way of settlement that the Bible opens to the great questions that press us?'"

The questions of supreme interest are few and simple. Is there a God? Is there a future existence for us? How can that existence be made a safe and satisfying one? If you are willing to allow any authority to the Bible at all, there can be no doubt as to the first two questions. There is a God by whom we were created and to whom we are responsible; there is a future existence. Those two questions are settled, if the Bible can settle

anything. And they are settled, let me add, in harmony with the profoundest instincts and the most imperative demands of our nature. Whatever a few souls in their struggling dissatisfaction and sad unrest may persuade themselves, the great yearning heart of humanity will quiet itself on nothing less than God and immortality. Even your former guide, Mr. —— (let me hope I may speak of him now as only your *former* guide), cries out in the presence of the dead and before the awful silence of the grave, "*Immortality* is a word that hope through all the ages has been whispering to love. All wish for happiness beyond this life; all hope to meet again the loved and lost." Yes, there are hours when the most hopeless are glad to turn to the hope that the Bible alone gives, when the bitterest rejecters of God and his word long for the consolation that only the rejected word affords.

Let us turn to the other question. If, when we are through with this life—as we soon shall be through with it—we are not through with exist-

ence—if there is a life beyond the present not measured by years or ages,—how can it be made worth having? Is there any way in which our immortality can be assured to us as an immortal good? After all the doubts and darkness, the mystery and suffering, the bitterness and disappointment, of this life, may it in any way be found a great and a good thing, after all, that we have lived? To answer these questions we must come back to the old truth—the truth of your childhood. The "advanced thought" of our day has discovered nothing to change the fact that men are out of the way, they are not what they should be. Every man knows this. The Bible expresses it in a very plain way by saying *they are sinners.* As such it deals with them; to such alone it opens its door of hope. The Bible is of no use to you unless you are a sinner. If you call this cant, I am sorry for it, but I cannot help it; I cannot change it. The only men for whom God is dealing here for good, for whom he is making possible an im-

mortality of honor and happiness, are the sinful. And is not this well for us? Does it not at once bring hope to you—a hope as great as it is mysterious? You know that life has not been to you an unstained thing any more than it has been to any of us. To know this is to know sin, the one appalling fact of the universe, the one unspeakable woe of our being.

In the simplest way, then, my dear A——, let me say that the first step in your coming right with God, and so right with the future, is to know and to feel that you are wrong. The Bible closes the door of hope for ever on the man who comes claiming the brightness and the good of a life beyond the grave because he is worthy of it. These words were once familiar to you: "By the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified." Rom. iii. 20.

Can he who is wrong make himself right? Can he be all he ought to be? Can he do all he ought to do? Can you set right all the wrong and all the failure of the past? Can you make the future

without error? To ask these questions is to answer them to every honest conscience.

For one who is wrong there must be the consequences of wrong, and these must be as fearful and as far-reaching as sin itself. "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap," and evermore and everywhere the harvest is greater than the seed. The coming tribulation and anguish of the unsaved souls that do evil is a law of nature as well as of revelation. The wages of sin is death. You know this. You have felt it in its measure. You have seen it in the unhappiness, the misery, the woe, the despair and death with which sin reigns everywhere around us. Take the brightest view of life that you can, and the darkness in which it ends is terrible. To go out of it without God is to go out without hope. Am I wrong in believing that you need no argument here, that no conviction is more sorrowfully intense with you than this?

Will you go now a step farther? Standing in your wrong and your weakness and your unrest,

with the heavy shadows of the future falling upon you, are you willing to draw near to the open portal of a better life? Are you willing to look up and read over it—"God so loved the world that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life"? John iii. 16. Are you willing to submit your faith to the mystery—beyond all depth except the love of God—that the Son of God in our nature has borne our sins in his own body on the tree—that he has died for us, the Just for the unjust? In other words, are you willing to receive the kingdom of heaven as a little child—to be saved, if saved you may be, in God's own way?

In a former letter I spoke of the testimony of Webster to the reality of the Christian religion; and, though it is true that Christianity does not depend upon the patronage of any man, it is well to know that greater intellects than those that would persuade you to reject it have bowed before it and found their supreme hope in it. Let me

give you, then, another testimony from this greatest of American statesmen and jurists. It was his last night on earth; that life of extraordinary influence and honor was closing. As his family and friends stood around his bed his physician repeated the immortal hymn of Cowper:

> "There is a fountain filled with blood
> Drawn from Immanuel's veins,
> And sinners, plunged beneath that flood,
> Lose all their guilty stains."

As upon the night-air died away the final stanza—

> "Then in a nobler, sweeter song
> I'll sing thy power to save
> When this poor, lisping, stammering tongue
> Lies silent in the grave,"

the majestic voice that had thrilled courts and senates, was heard in a clear thrice-repeated "Amen! Amen! Amen!" And so he passed, let us hope, to have part in that final song. Pity,

infinite pity, that he had not made more of that magnificent intellect for the Giver of it! But at least he was too great a man to deny the Love and the Sacrifice by which alone the life of the greatest as well as the feeblest can be saved from being an eternal tragedy.

I know, my dear A——, the derision with which all this may be received, but my hope is that you have passed beyond that point of intellectual self-conceit and moral self-murder. At all events, this is the only ground of a safe immortality that the Bible holds out, and beyond the Bible there is no ground. If you ever settle safely the solemn questions of the future, you will settle them here. If you ever find the rest for which I know you are weary, you will find it at the cross and in the presence of Him who hung upon it, and whose words are to-day, as of old, "Come unto me, and I will give you rest."

In all this I know there is nothing new to you. I had nothing new to say; I wished simply to

make a plea for the faith of your earlier years. It is easy to put it aside, but, after all, it is a faith that will stand. The evidence of nineteen centuries from millions of honest and intelligent witnesses, of all ranks and conditions, living and dying, to the power of this faith to sustain in the most solemn crises of life, when flesh and heart are failing, and when the darkness and anguish and mystery of death are rocking the soul to its foundations, cannot wisely be dismissed as a delusion: there must be a reality behind it. The lights that have gone out from your own home and heart you were right in believing have "not gone out in darkness," but you will not forget that as they went into purer light they went with Him who has brought life and immortality to light, who is the Resurrection and the Life, in whom believing, though we were dead, yet shall we live.

Here I must rest. I can only commend you to God and to the word of his grace—to the written word and to the incarnate Word, to the Bible and

to Christ. I am as certain as I am of my own existence that if you will give yourself up to the guidance of these you will be satisfied and you will be saved. If you will only take the Bible *and follow it,* you will find an assurance of its truth that cannot be shaken; you will find rest, for you will find Christ. And surely it is not too much to ask that in a matter of such infinite importance you make a fair, honest and thorough trial of that which no man ever yet made trial of to be disappointed.

Yet let me not fail to impress as a final thought that this result of good and of peace will come *only by the power of the Holy Spirit.* It is his to take of the things of Christ and show them to us; unless he does this, we cannot see them. My last word of entreaty, then, is—and I would make it as earnestly as conviction and feeling and language can make it—yield to the Spirit of God. The end you want is too great for your own strength. You have proved this. You have struggled on long

enough in your own plans and your own way, seeking rest, and you are as far from rest as ever. Try now another way. Take hold of a higher strength. "Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find." I plead with you by all the memories of the past and by all the hopes of the future. You have sinned, and I would not heal the hurt slightly. No one knows better than you that if the Bible is true you have a long and dark account against you —if not of open and flagrant sin, yet to the Mind that makes no mistakes of that which is perhaps far worse, of calm, deliberate, persistent rejection of Christ and of his Spirit. It would be faithlessness and cruelty to hide the fact that by all the verities of God you are in peril—in fearful peril. To stand in darkness where no light is is sad enough; but when Light is come into the world and men stand in darkness, there is sin that seals its own doom. As the case is now, the very unrest of your soul—its dark gropings, its unsatisfied yearnings, its sighs of despair—all this is the liv-

ing witness of your danger, the prophecy of a deeper gloom and woe to come.

But as yet it is also the voice of God's mercy; it is the plea of his Spirit calling you to the only rest that the universe has for the erring and the sinful. The Spirit of God is very pitiful. Every thought of good is from him; every desire for a better life is his inspiration; every penitent sigh is his breath. I believe he is not far from you; I believe, therefore, you are not far from the kingdom of heaven. Quench not the Spirit. Do not go down in darkness in sight of the City of Light.

You remember the circumstances of our return from Europe in the fall of 18—. We were young then, but the events are still vivid in my memory, as they are no doubt in yours. For two days we were delayed in Liverpool by a fearful storm. In that storm the Royal Charter was coming in, having made successfully the voyage of the world. She had been signaled, and was already in the

Channel; her arrival was looked for every hour. Dear friends of those we were leaving were on board. The fires were lighted on the hearth, and the table was spread for the long-absent ones, and glad hearts were waiting impatiently to give them joyful welcome. But they never came; in sight of the harbor and of the lights of home they went down—the four hundred of that doomed ship. The next day we passed the silent wreck as we came out, and I am sure you thought, as I did, how unutterably sad and pathetic is such an end, to perish in sight of home.

Our voyage, dear A——, is almost over. The harbor is near; the lights of the eternal home are in sight; the table is spread, and dear ones—yours and mine—are waiting there to give us glad and everlasting welcome. Do not make wreck of life and hope and immortality in the very sight of home.

Yours, in the bonds of early years,

C——.

Since these letters were written, he to whom they were addressed has gone where human arguments and pleadings cannot reach him. In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, he passed from the scenes of a busy, honored and prosperous life into the solemn mysteries that lie beyond our horizon. On his desk was found the following unfinished letter, written the night before his death:

My Dear C——: I have not misapprehended the spirit and motive of your letters. I have read them—more than once—with care and, I believe, with candor. When a man stands in the shadow of a great and awful change—and my physician warns me that my lifework may end suddenly—he is a fool who deals any other way than seriously and honestly with the questions you discuss. If I cannot say that your reasoning removes all my doubts, I can most sincerely say this, even though it may be, in your judgment, at the cost of my consistency: *I would give the world to have your*

faith and hope. While I have been glad to have the arguments of Mr. —— to support my own faith or want of faith, I will be candid and say that I have not been at rest. Life has been terribly empty and hopeless since I felt, with Professor Clifford, that "the Great Companion is dead." I have had success, as the world goes, but what of it? What does it amount to? What is to be the end of it all? No God! No immortality! Nothing beyond this little circle whose utmost limit I seem to be even now touching! Is it so?

I am writing at midnight—an hour when these questions often come to me with the pressure of despair. Oh to be a child again with a child's faith, a child's peace! My mother—"

Here the letter ended. Did the thought of his mother open the door of his aching heart to his mother's God and his mother's Christ? So let us hope. There is a mercy that is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear God, and a right-

eousness that is unto children's children to such as keep his covenant.

Lying upon the letter was the following slip, cut from a newspaper. It was stained apparently with tears, and was probably the last thing that my friend read. It could hardly be the expression of any heart to whom the "hand of mercy" was not already "opening the wicket-gate:"

"'Mid the fast-falling shadows,
Weary and worn and late,
A timid, doubting pilgrim,
I reach the wicket-gate.
Where crowds have stood before me
I stand alone to-night,
And in the deepening darkness
Pray for one gleam of light.

"From the foul sloughs and marshes
I've gathered many a stain;
I've heard old voices calling
From far across the plain.
Now, in my wretched weakness,
Fearful and sad I wait,

And every refuge fails me,
  Here at the wicket-gate.

"And will the portals open
  To me who roamed so long
Filthy and vile and burdened
  With this great weight of wrong?
Hark! a glad voice of welcome
  Bids my wild fears abate.
Look! for a hand of mercy
  Opens the wicket-gate.

"On, to the palace Beautiful
  And the bright room called Peace!
Down, to the silent river,
  Where thou shalt find release!
Up, to the radiant city,
  Where shining ones await!
On! for the way of glory
  Lies through the wicket-gate."

DIFFICULTIES OF THE BIBLE.

DIFFICULTIES OF THE BIBLE

AS TESTED BY

THE LAWS OF EVIDENCE.*

One has to breathe but little of the atmosphere of popular thought to-day to find how full it is of religious doubt. Parental faiths count for little. The beliefs of childhood, the teachings of the sainted dead, the hopes that once brightened the darkness and mysteries and griefs of life with the light of a cloudless future, are to multitudes no more. "The eclipse of faith" has come, and souls are

* The substance of this essay was given as an address before the Bible Conference in Philadelphia in November, 1887. It has, however, been revised and considerably changed with reference to its present use.—T. S. C.

drifting out upon the starless, shoreless sea of unbelief. They see "the spring sun shining out of an empty heaven to light up a soulless earth." They take up the wail of despair: "We are all to be swept away in the final ruin of the earth." This is the deep, pathetic undertone of the sighing of a thousand hearts to-day.

Has life anything real? Is it worth living? When the little play is over, and the hour's music is ended, and the lights are out, and we go forth into the darkness of the final night—what then? Is it darkness for ever? or is there the light of an eternal day? Who knows? Is anything certain? Must nations and men and the evening-moth alike go down and perish for ever under the crush of an inexorable fate? Is there no rift in this cloud? Have we no anchor that will hold as the storm drives us on through the blinding mists and gloom to the eternal shore? Have we no sure word of promise to which we can cling when everything else around us and under our feet is giving way?

Is the Bible true? That is the simple but momentous question; it settles all other questions of most concern to men. To it, therefore, we find the most intense thought of thoughtful men converging. That from this there should emerge questions not easily solved is not to be wondered at: they emerge in every inquiry of human thought. The only thing to be asked is that these questions be dealt with candidly and fairly.

To many minds the Bible is still on trial; it is only just that in its trial those rules and principles shall be observed which men everywhere expect and demand shall be observed for themselves when they or their interests are to be tried.

This is the point of this essay. It is not, indeed, a discussion from the highest ground of inspiration; it does not claim to be. It simply deals with a certain class—a very large class, however—of alleged difficulties of the Bible, and it appeals to the candid reader to deal with them as fairly and by the same rules as he would have his

fellow-men deal with him in a matter of life or death, or of any worldly interest.

For this object only a few of the common rules of evidence have been taken. It is believed, however, that their application will cover a very large portion of the popular objections to the alleged inconsistencies and contradictions of the Bible.

Undoubtedly, there are difficulties in the Bible; the question is whether these prove that it is not the work and word of God. On the other hand, it may be suggested whether they do not confirm it as the work of God, for they at once put it in harmony with all his other works. If the Bible were without difficulties, it would, for us, be out of the line with everything else that God has made or done. Nature and Providence are full of difficulties. There is nothing in the Bible harder of explanation and reconciliation than are the facts that meet us everywhere in God's creative and providential realms. If these difficulties do not prove that Nature and Providence are not, from

beginning to end, the works of God, they do not on the face of them prove that the Bible is not such.

In dealing with the difficulties of the Scriptures, therefore, we have not the least idea that they will all be removed: difficulties will remain. The Lord of hosts himself is a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence upon which many stumble and fall and are broken. Isa. viii. 14, 15. If a man is determined to commit suicide, he can do it by the very means that God has created to preserve life—by fire or by water. Spiritual self-destruction is quite possible through the word of life itself. At the same time, no man has a right to put needless difficulties in the Bible or to make difficulties where none exist. More than this, every man is bound to deal as fairly at least with the Bible as he deals with his fellow-men in the ordinary relations of life. That which would give him no trouble as a judge upon the bench or a juror in the box ought not to be urged as a fatal objection to the Scriptures.

In testing at this time some of the difficulties of the Bible by the accepted rules of evidence, hardly more can be done than to present a few of these rules as applicable to these difficulties. But the rules are of the widest application; the solution of one difficulty by them is the solution of a hundred.

Looking upon the Bible as a whole, we may refer for a moment to the familiar precept that every man is to be presumed innocent until he is proved guilty. This is emphatically true of a man of good general reputation. The rule would seem as applicable to a book as to a man. Now, the Bible is not a new book; it has been before the world for ages. It has a character. That it is on the whole a good book the bitterest opposers of its plenary inspiration not only admit, but assert. It is conceded that it is entitled to its name—the *Bible, the* Book. It claims to be a truthful book; by every fair principle this claim must be allowed until it is shown to be false. Bancroft's *History*

of the United States claims to be a reliable work; the claim is generally admitted. If a man now comes forward and asserts that it is false in whole or in details, by universal judgment he must prove his assertion, and obviously his proofs must be stronger than the evidences of the truth of the history. If this is so in reference to a book that has not stood the test of half a century, emphatically is it true of a book whose character has been established through the searching scrutiny of friends and foes for fifteen centuries—ay, for twice fifteen centuries. If a man now affirms the Bible to be false, wholly or in part, it rests upon him in all fairness to prove his position, and his evidence must be stronger than that which supports the book. For three thousand years a growing mass of testimony to the truth of the Bible has been rolling up in the face of every objection that ingenuity, learning and the bitterest hostility could present. Account for it as we may, that is the fact. There is, therefore, a reasonable presumption

in its favor, and in favor of any specific statement that it makes. If, then, we find in it a positive statement in regard to any fact, and that statement is now confronted by another and a contradictory one, the two do not stand on the same level. The new claimant must prove his position, and to prove it he must disprove the truth of the Scripture record. It is not enough to show that his proposition might be true if we had no other information on the subject: he must show that the Scripture, with its mass of supporting and cumulative evidence, is false; and he must support his new proposition by a body of evidence stronger than this manifold evidence of ages by which the Scriptures are sustained.

The application of this principle is obvious, yet nothing is more common than its violation. An hypothesis with certain analogies perhaps in its favor, but admittedly without a solitary positive proof to sustain it, is put forward as an established truth without regard to the fact that the Bible, with

its general character of veracity behind it, gives another and an entirely different account of the matter. We will not say this is irreverent: it is unfair and unreasonable.

The character of the Bible may justly claim to sustain its record till it is proved false. Deal with it as fairly as you deal with the red-handed anarchist: let the book be innocent till proved guilty; and if innocent, the written word, like the incarnate Word, stands a true witness in all things for ever. Condemned, crucified, buried, it will rise again. It is a perilous thing to condemn the guiltless.

Let us pass to another rule of law; it is this: "The testimony of a single witness, where there is no ground for suspecting either his ability or integrity, is a sufficient legal ground for belief" (*Starkie on Ev.*, i. 550). The mere silence of one witness or of many witnesses cannot set aside the clear, positive testimony of a single trustworthy witness. That Josephus does not mention events

which Moses records does not affect the truth of the Mosaic record, and his silence as to the Bethlehem massacre—even if no reason could be suggested for it, as there can be—cannot, under this rule of law, affect the positive testimony of Matthew that there was such a massacre.

The courts go farther than this. They say, "If a witness swear positively that he saw or heard a fact, and another *who was present* that he did not see or hear it, and the witnesses are equally faithworthy, the affirmative witness is to be believed" (*Decisions of the Supreme Court of Errors of the State of Connnecticut*, vol. vi. p. 188). In the case referred to in that decision the court set aside a verdict that had been rendered by the lower court on the negative testimony of eleven witnesses against the positive testimony of three. The principle recognized by that decision, and which is universally accepted as law, is that the negative testimony of witnesses present at any given transaction cannot set aside the positive testimony of a far less num-

ber of witnesses, or even of a single reliable witness.

The silence of any of the evangelists in reference to an incident or event at which they may have been present, but which possibly they may not have noticed or which they do not record, does not contradict in the least the testimony of *one* who says such an incident occurred. The fact of the marriage in Cana is not at all disturbed because John is the only witness who testifies to it. So if one writer states a part of an incident or of a discourse which another writer omits, while the latter gives a part which the first omits, there is no contradiction. Matthew (xx. 20) says the mother of Zebedee's children made a certain request which Mark (x. 35) says the children themselves made. But this is not inconsistent: the children united with the mother in the request. Matthew calls attention to one party; Mark, to another. Nothing can be more unreasonable than the cavil that stumbles at such difficulties.

The rule before us applies to that extraordinary doubt of modern criticism—whether the Israelites were ever in Egypt, because, as affirmed, the monuments do not record their presence nor their flight nor the destruction of the Egyptian host at the Red Sea. Now, leaving out of the argument the strong probability that the monuments do refer to their presence in Egypt, and the further probability that the Egyptians would not be likely to preserve on their monuments the record of their own ignominy and overthrow, the objection could not stand for a moment in any court of justice in the presence of the positive testimony of the record to the history in Egypt—all the more as this testimony is sustained by an extraordinary weight of incidental corroborative evidence, and is involved in the whole subsequent history of the nation.

Grant, if you will, that there are improbabilities in parts of the history; still, the courts rule that "mere improbability can rarely supply a sufficient

ground for disbelieving direct and unexceptionable witnesses of the fact where there was no room for mistake" (*Starkie*, i. 558; see also *Greenleaf on Ev.*, i. 1, 14, 15). That canon, fairly applied, sweeps away no inconsiderable portion of the objections to the Scripture histories. Take the great decisive fact of the resurrection of Christ—a fact that carries with it the whole Christian system and the verity of the whole Christian revelation. It is a fact of testimony—of the testimony of many witnesses, under a great variety of circumstances, at many times and places, and extending through so long a period as to preclude all reasonable or admissible supposition of "mistake." No fact of ancient history can be proved by testimony if the resurrection of Christ cannot be. The proof stands by itself, positive, direct, unexceptionable as to the character and capacity of the witnesses. It is proof that the law declares cannot be set aside by "mere improbability;" and if this fact is established, everything essential to Christianity is established.

The seal of the risen Christ is on the Old Testament; his blood is on the New Testament. It is, throughout, the living book of the slain and living Lord.

Another very important rule of law is this: "In cases of conflicting evidence, the first step in the process of inquiry must naturally and obviously be to ascertain whether the apparent inconsistencies and incongruities which it presents may not without violence be reconciled" (*Starkie*, i. 578). "Where there is an apparent inconsistency or contradiction in the testimony of witnesses, such construction shall be put upon it as to make it agree if possible, for perjury is not to be presumed" (*6 Conn.* 189). Nothing is more remarkable than the constant violation of this rule by many of the critics of the Bible; their effort is to see, not if the testimony can be made to agree, but if by any possibility it can be forced to appear contradictory. It is hardly putting it too strongly to say that many of these efforts would not be considered re-

spectable, and would not be tolerated by the critics themselves, if they concerned any other book than the Bible and any other subject than Christianity.

The courts take even stronger ground on the obligation of harmonizing apparently conflicting evidence. If the elements of reconciliation are not found in the evidence itself, they insist on the admission of any reasonable supposition that will explain the difficulty.

"Where doubt arises," says Starkie (*Ev.* i. 586), "from circumstances of an apparently opposite and conflicting tendency, the first step in the natural order of inquiry is to ascertain whether they be not in reality reconcilable, especially when circumstances cannot be rejected without imputing perjury to a witness; for perjury is not to be presumed, and in the absence of all suspicion that hypothesis is to be adopted which consists with and reconciles all the circumstances which the case supplies." (See also *Starkie*, i. 578, 582.)

Take the familiar case of the taxing when Cyrenius was governor of Syria. Luke ii. 2. Everybody knows how confidently it was asserted that Luke was in error because Cyrenius' government of Syria was several years later than Luke makes it; equally, every one knows how that difficulty was met by the supposition, made almost a certainty, that Cyrenius was twice governor of Syria —once at the time in question, and once later. Even if the supposition were not as probable as it is, if there were no other way of solving the difficulty, we should be justified by the principle of law in assuming it rather than to assume that a witness as intelligent as Luke, and with his opportunities of knowledge and with no motive for misstatement, should either wilfully or carelessly have made so gross an error. Here the rule fits perfectly: "In the absence of all suspicion, *that hypothesis is to be adopted which consists with and reconciles all the circumstances which the case supplies.*"

In regard to certain objections to the Mosaic

record—for example, the improbability of the desert sustaining the host of the Israelites: we select this as an example of a mass of like objections—Dean Stanley, while holding in general to the historic fact, says the recorded miracles do not meet the difficulty and we have no right to add to them; for "if we have no warrant to take away, we have no warrant to add." If by this he meant we have no right to add to the inspired word *as a part of it* what is not in it, he is quite correct; but if he meant, as he evidently did, that we have no right to make a reasonable supposition to explain an apparent difficulty of the word, no utterance can be more groundless. He might as well object that Moses could not possibly have led the Israelites through the desert forty years because no man could do that without sleeping, and the record does not say that Moses slept during all that time, and "we have no warrant to add" to the record.

The same difficulty is urged by others from the

present barrenness of the desert, which it is contended is substantially as it was in the time of the Exodus. This is to be met not so much by hypothesis as by the facts—(1) that the condition of the desert was very different then from its condition now. Because the country around Philadelphia cannot now support a tribe of Indians by hunting and fishing, it does not follow that it could not do this two hundred years ago. (2) God had undertaken to bring the nation out. If every miracle necessary to accomplish this end is not recorded, it does not prove that it was not wrought. As in the life of our Lord, so in the deliverance of Israel, many miracles may have been wrought of which no account has come down to us.

This suggests an obvious and a very important consideration: *facts may now be missing* which were perfectly well known at the time of the event, but the record of which has not been preserved. Hence, if a difficulty can be removed by a reasonable supposition, or even by any admissible supposition,

of a missing fact, we are entitled to make that supposition.

Webster (*Works*, vol. vi. p. 64) in his address to the jury on the celebrated trial of the Knapps for the murder of Captain White of Salem, Massachusetts, says: "In explaining circumstances of evidence which are apparently irreconcilable or unaccountable, if a fact be suggested which at once accounts for all and reconciles all, by whomsoever it may be stated, it is still difficult not to believe that such fact is the true fact belonging to the case." The missing fact that was wanted in this case to show a motive for the murder was the stealing of a will, or the purpose to steal a will, and this proved the true hypothesis.

To illustrate by a familiar incident of the Old Testament history. The prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel foretell the fate of the last king of Judah, Zedekiah. Jer. xxxii.; Ezek. xii. They declare that he shall be taken captive by the king of Babylon, that he shall go to Babylon and that he shall die in

Babylon; yet Ezekiel expressly says that he shall not see Babylon. Now, here is apparently as gross a contradiction as there can be; and if our information stopped here, it would be impossible to reconcile it. Fortunately, however, the explanation is given in the history. From 2 Kings xxv. we learn that the king of Babylon, when Zedekiah was brought into his presence at Riblah, ordered his eyes to be put out and sent him blind to Babylon; so that he saw the king of Babylon, he went to Babylon, he died in Babylon, and yet he never saw Babylon. But—and this is the point of this familiar case—if this unexpected and extraordinary fact had not been stated, how absolutely impossible it would have been to give any satisfactory solution of the difficulty! It may be doubted whether any supposition as violent as this needs to be made to reconcile every alleged contradiction of the Bible.

A remarkable illustration of the power of a missing fact occurs in the history of the overthrow of

Babylon itself. The Scripture account (Dan. v.) says that Belshazzar was king of Babylon, that he was in the city, engaged in a feast, at the time of its capture, and that he was slain. Reliable secular historians give the name of the king as Nabonnedus or Labynetus, and state that he was not in the city when it was captured, that he was not killed, but taken prisoner, kindly treated and allowed to retire to private life. These different accounts were not only eagerly seized upon by skeptics as proofs of the error of the Scriptures, but even biblical scholars admitted them to be incapable of reconciliation. No longer ago than when the writer was in the theological seminary that prince of biblical students, Addison Alexander, said that no solution of the difficulty was known; he was too wise a man to say that no solution was possible. Kitto, in his *Cyclopedia*, declared that no hypothesis *could* harmonize the accounts. Yet the reconciliation was perfectly simple. A cylinder of historic records discovered by Sir Henry Rawlinson

in the ruins of Lower Babylon showed that there were at this time two kings of Babylon, a father and a son. One was occupying a stronghold near the city, the other was defending the city itself; the latter was taken and slain, the former was spared. Thus, by the providential bringing to light of a fact buried for centuries, that which had seemed to be, and which had repeatedly and triumphantly been proclaimed to be, and which had been given up *as* being, an irreconcilable contradiction, was shown to be perfectly harmonious. Yet if the hypothesis of two kings had been suggested as an explanation before the discovery of the fact, it would have been hissed out of court by the whole skeptical school.

The two accounts of the death of Judas have not passed out of the field of popular objection. Matthew (xxvii. 5) says he committed suicide; Luke (Acts i. 18) says he fell headlong and burst asunder. He does not say where he fell from or what were the circumstances of the fall, and it is certainly not

impossible, or even improbable, that both accounts are true. The traitor hung himself, possibly, on the verge of a precipice—the supposed spot furnishes all the conditions for this—and afterward (how long is not said) the rope or the limb of the tree gave way, and he fell, striking first on the rocks at the foot of the tree and then plunging over the precipice with the result described by Luke.

The case is not without a parallel. A few weeks since the papers noticed the death of a gentleman in one of our Western States. According to one account, he perished in a railroad disaster; according to another, he committed suicide—a contradiction almost exactly like that in the case of Judas. Yet there was no real discrepancy. With his wife and child he was on the fatal train that met its doom at Chatsworth. His child was killed; he and his wife were taken from the ruins terribly injured. The wife soon died; in despair, and with no hope of his own life, he drew his pistol and

sent the ball through his own head. He perished in the Chatsworth disaster, and he committed suicide.

The application of these principles of law—the admission of any reasonable hypothesis, or of an hypothesis that may seem *improbable*, if it removes the difficulty, the supposition of missing facts known at the time, but now lost—principles of constant application in our courts of justice,—releases at once the pressure from a large part of the objections to the inspired record. The accounts of the healing of the blind men at Jericho and the resurrection of Christ—two of the most difficult of full explanation in the New Testament—require no more than this. It is not hard to present reasonable hypotheses to meet the cases as they stand; and if all the facts were known to us we believe the harmony would be as complete and as simple as that of the histories of the siege and capture of Babylon.

We draw the discussion to a close with the words

of the eminent American jurist and legal authority, Professor Greenleaf: "All that Christianity [or the Bible] asks of men on this subject is that they would be consistent with themselves, that they would treat its evidence as they treat the evidence of other things, and that they would try and judge its actors and witnesses as they deal with their fellow-men when testifying to human affairs and actions in human tribunals."

This, as we have said, is not the highest claim that we can make for the Bible; but if men will go as far as this, and deal with the alleged contradictions of the book honestly by the common rules of evidence, the vast majority of all the difficulties to which these rules apply will disappear. In the mean time, if there are those that do not yield to present knowledge, we can afford to wait. Many objections once supposed to be unanswerable have been answered, and the process is going on. God is very patient, but we may be assured that He who just as the occasion has demanded has sum-

moned up the silent witnesses to his word from the valley of the Nile, from the stormy cliffs of Sinai, from the plains of Mesopotamia and from the sullen shores of the Dead Sea, will not fail in the future to give all the confirmation of his truth that the faith of his Church may need.

WASHINGTON, D. C., 1888.

THE END.